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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000987

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SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO CHAVEZ' EFFORT TO RENEW COUNTER-DRUG
COOPERATION - LOW HANGING FRUIT

REF: CARACAS 000945

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) On the margins of the July 5 Venezuelan Independence Day parade, President Chavez told the Ambassador, in front of the diplomatic corps and state media, that he wanted to renew counternarcotics cooperation with the USG (Reftel). Chavez' overture, reiterated in a Ministry of Communications and Information communique, has been the subject of considerable local diplomatic and media attention. The embassy followed up with working level MFA officials, who suggested the Ambassador write to Foreign Minister Maduro seeking follow-on working level meetings between Emboffs and appropriate Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials. The Ambassador sent just such a letter to FM Maduro on July 15. Post has prepared a list of possible first steps the BRV should be able to take should the BRV actually agree to move forward on counterdrug cooperation. Embassy would welcome Washington agencies' comments on these ideas as well as any additional suggestions.

¶2. (C) In the event that BRV officials are ready to discuss ways forward, the embassy intends to raise the following list of suggestions on possible ways the BRV can effectively and immediately renew counternarcotics bilateral cooperation:

--- Instruct General Henry Rangel Silva of DISIP, General Hugo Carvajal of DIM, Justice Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin, Colonel Nestor Reverol of ONA and General Freddy Carrion of the National Guard of the new policy to cooperate with the United States in counter-narcotics and fighting international crime. In turn, they need to instruct working level officials in their respective organizations that cooperation with the United States is authorized and that they are encouraged to seek out technical support, training, intelligence and investigative assistance from the USG on narcotics and money laundering cases.

--- Have these officials make public statements discussing the importance of cooperating with other countries, including the United States, on counternarcotics operations.

--- Establish a network of responsive BRV law enforcement liaison contacts who can receive actionable drug intelligence and carry out arrests.

--- Approve the pending visa applications of seven DEA agents. Resuming regular cooperation will require more officers than are currently at post.

--- Restore access of ICE personnel to Simon Bolivar International Airport in Maiquetia and instruct immigration and customs authorities that cooperation with the United States is encouraged.

--- Use the NAS-funded Cargo Inspection Center in Puerto Cabello for the physical inspection of suspicious cargo, and facilitate the re-export of the inoperable DualVision 547 X-ray machine to the United States.

--- Reinstate the certification of the NGO Prevencion Alternativa. NGO's certified by ONA and using ONA approved materials should be encouraged to seek the assistance of the Embassy in funding demand reduction programs.

--- De-politicize the Venezuelan Superintendent of Banks (SUDEBANS) Financial Intelligence Unit and facilitate financial information-sharing.

13. (C) Should the BRV respond positively to elements of the aforementioned ideas, the Embassy would make every effort to build on the existing framework for counternarcotics cooperation. The 1978 Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation on the Elimination of Unlawful Use, Illicit Traffic and Smuggling of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances remains in effect and provides a framework for such cooperation. The Addendum that was negotiated from 2004 to 2006, but which the BRV declined to sign, remains useful for moving ahead, particularly if any new USG counternarcotics assistance is contemplated for allocation to Venezuela.

14. (C) In addition, if the BRV actually moves forward on some of the aforementioned ideas, it would be useful if the BRV

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assigned a Colonel from the Venezuelan National Guard (VNG) to the Liaison Officer (LNO) position at JIATF-S. The VNG is the most active counter-drug entity in Venezuela. Putting a Venezuelan officer in the thick of drug surveillance where he can pass actionable intelligence to the VNG will be the quickest way to verify the BRV's commitment to fighting drugs. It would have the added bonus of pressuring the BRV to approve visas for U.S. law enforcement to operate in Venezuela. Four Venezuelan journalists visited Southcom and JIATF-South July 13-16 and were informed of Venezuela's previous participation at JIATF-South. This visit should help reinforce, via the local media, the potential benefits of the BRV cooperating with the USG to combat narcotics trafficking.

15. (C) Comment: Chavez' overture on counternarcotics cooperation may be an insincere public relations effort, but it is still worth testing. Most local analysts believe Chavez is making an effort to lower his confrontational tone simply to enhance his domestic standing in the run-up to November's state and local elections. Others suggest Chavez may be interested in at least fostering the appearance of international narcotics cooperation to counter increasing public criticism of his administration's handling of crime. In any event, we want to put the onus on the BRV to translate Chavez' words into deeds. While Chavez' overture was offered in a bilateral context, Embassy will also look for opportunities to encourage greater multilateral counternarcotics cooperation with USG partners, such as the UK and Canada.

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